

# The impact of promoting revised UK low-risk drinking guidelines on alcohol consumption: interrupted time series analysis

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## Plain English summary

Revised UK low-risk drinking guidelines on alcohol consumption

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## Plain English summary

In 2016, the UK's Chief Medical Officers updated their alcohol drinking guidelines to say that men and women should not drink > 14 units of alcohol per week. Fourteen units is approximately six pints of average-strength beer, one and a half bottles of wine or 14 single shots of spirits. Previously, the guidelines had recommended that men should not regularly consume more than 3–4 units per day and women should not regularly consume more than 2–3 units per day. This project examined whether or not announcing the new guidelines led to a change in how much people were drinking.

We surveyed approximately 1700 adults in England each month between March 2014 and October 2017. The survey asked people about how much they drink, whether or not they were aware of the drinking guidelines, whether or not they knew what the guideline was and a series of questions about whether or not they were willing and able to change their drinking. We then compared the responses of people surveyed before the guidelines were changed with those of people surveyed afterwards to see if there was a difference.

There was no immediate change in how much people drank after the new guidelines were announced. People's drinking did gradually become more risky over time, but this change began 6 months before the announcement. Most people were aware that there was a drinking guideline, but fewer than one-quarter of them knew what it was. This did not change after the announcement. Similarly, people's willingness and ability to change their drinking did not change after the new guidelines were announced.

Overall, we conclude that announcing the new drinking guidelines did not lead to changes in how much people drink. An important reason for this may be that the guidelines were not promoted in a television or radio campaign after they were announced. This may be because the alcohol industry criticised the guidelines, because the government had other priorities or because charities lacked money to pay for campaigns. The guidelines might also have had more of an impact if more people understood how to use alcohol units and guidelines to keep track of their drinking and found it helpful to do so.

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